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THEODULUS IN SCOTS

Not far from 1504-5 a lively and abusive correspondence,¹ in verse, sprang up between William Dunbar, the Scottish poet, courtier, and free-spoken ecclesiastic, and his friend, Walter Kennedy, also reckoned a poet in his day, who rather piqued himself on his piety and his Celtic blood. They went to the business of "flyting," as they called it, with some thoroughness. Dunbar confides to his friend, Sir John the Ross, that Kennedy and Quintyne Schaw have been praising each other in an extravagant manner; he would be sorry, indeed, to get into a controversy with them—what he would write would be too dreadful; but if the provocation continues he may be forced to "ryme, and rais the feynd with flytting."

Kennedy quickly takes up the challenge on behalf of himself and his "commissar," Quintyne, demanding an apology and silence. Dunbar then begins the attack with a torrent of abuse against the "Iersche brybour baird" (vagabond Celtic bard). The battle is now on, and Kennedy replies with abuse no less torrential. "Insenswat sow," he calls Dunbar, in an obscure passage on which we shall be able to shed some light before we are through:

Insenswat sow, ceiss, fals Ewstace air!
And knaw, kene skald, I hald of Alathia [ll. 81-82].

He again demands penance from Dunbar and recognition of his own superiority as a poet. He then takes up the cudgels on behalf of "Erische" as the proper tongue of all true Scotsmen, and blames Dunbar for his and his ancestors' partiality to the English—a matter which he later develops at length—bids him, meanwhile, be off to England and perish. He then enters with some detail upon an imaginary genealogy of his opponent. In reply, Dunbar, with a liberal sprinkling of epithet, reminds his antagonist of two presumably discreditable passages in his past life at Paisley and in Galloway, taunts him with using

Sic eloquence as thay in Erschry vse [l. 243],

¹ J. Schipper, "The Poems of William Dunbar," *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Phil.-Hist. Cl. (Wien, 1892), Bd. 40, Abth. IV, pp. 50-99; on the date see especially p. 52.

and, after some description of Kennedy's personal appearance, concludes with a masterly picture of Kennedy's entrance into Edinburgh. Kennedy, as an offset, offers an exaggerated and unsavory account of Dunbar's sea voyage, and discusses at length the unpatriotic record of Dunbar's ancestors, contrasting it with that of his own forbears. In conclusion he advises Dunbar to get himself hanged in France, or, better still, to come home and be hanged at Ayr.

Who conceived the plan of collecting and publishing this correspondence is not known. There is a print of 1508 by Chepman and Myllar, a fragment of which is extant; there are, besides, three manuscripts, Bannatyne, Maitland, and Reidpeth. In none of these forms is the material ordered precisely as outlined above. The arrangement here adopted is Dr. Schipper's, which pays due regard to the internal evidence. With the help of such evidence the *Flyting* takes on some appearance of literary form; it seems to be reducible to some sort of order. Dunbar sounds the warning in three stanzas; Kennedy responds in three stanzas of the same metrical scheme. Dunbar opens the attack in three stanzas; Kennedy's reply covers sixteen stanzas, closing with one containing internal rhyme. Dunbar comes back with twenty-two stanzas in the same metrical scheme, closing, like Kennedy, with internal rhyme. Kennedy's last word is again of twenty-two stanzas. Following Kennedy's first reply (l. 48) and his second (l. 200) (but not his last), there is an appeal to

Iuge 3e now heir quha gat the war [worse].

If Schipper's arrangement is mainly right, there is certainly an approach to metrical regularity, to the "matching" of stanzaic arrangement. This, together with the appeal to the judge, and, indeed, the notion of collecting the correspondence soon after its composition and serving it up as a literary whole, has lent encouragement to the search for the literary origins of the "flyting."

It may very well be that such a search is supererogatory. Although of personal animosity between the "flyters" there may have been none at all,¹ there was difference of opinion in abundance. Politically there would be little sympathy between the Ayrshire Celt,

¹ Dunbar, in his *Lament for the Makaris* (ll. 89 ff.), speaks without malice of "gud Maister Walter Kennedy," now at the point of death.

Kennedy, at whose "Erische" Dunbar scoffs,¹ and the Lothian Saxon, sprung of a family traditionally favorable to the English, and himself the preferred servant of the King's English queen. Between the two men there was a temperamental difference no less striking: Kennedy, to judge from his works, was inclined to a piety which delighted in conformity to tradition; Dunbar, who had left the Franciscans to seek preferment at court as a secular priest, spoke lightly sometimes of religious matters, and told stories not wholly to the credit of his old order. Kennedy evidently had a kind of personal vanity (he styles himself "the rose of rhetoric," [l. 148]), which may well have tested the endurance of Dunbar, who belongs to the genus, at any rate, of Rabelais and Swift. Two such men needed no strong literary promptings to fall into controversy, even though they did not personally dislike each other, and went to it in great part for the amusement of the bystanders and the exercise of their own wits.

After Dunbar and Kennedy had shown the way, the "flyting" had considerable vogue as a court amusement. Skelton engaged in a "flyting" with Garnesche, and four of his "defenses" are extant, written or published, so he says, "by the kynges most noble commaundment."² He ran at tilt also with Robert Gaguin, a French friar.³ Sir David Lyndesay was called upon thus to bandy words with his sovereign, James V;⁴ Lyndesay's answer, all that is extant, is a rather tame mixture of compliment and good, if grossly phrased, advice. Still later, Thomas Churchyard exchanged broadsides with one Camel, which ran into "surrejoindre unto rejoindre."⁵ Between Alexander Montgomerie and Sir Patrick Hume, of Polwart, there was much "laidlie language loud and large," which greatly amused the royal author of the *Reulis and Cautelis*.⁶ I cannot see in these

¹ Lines 49, 105 ff., 243 ff., 273.

² *The Poetical Works of John Skelton: Principally According to the Edition of the Rev. Alexander Dyce* (Boston, 1864), I, 132-53.

³ *Garlande of Laurell*, *ibid.*, II, 186, 222. For what is possibly a fragment of the *Recule ageint Gaguine*, see F. Brie, "Skelton-Studien," *Englische Studien*, XXXVII (1907), 31 f.

⁴ *Early English Text Society*, XLVII, 563-65.

⁵ *The Contention betwyxte Churchyard and Camell, upon David Dycers Dreame*, 2d. ed., 1565. See Robert Lemon, *Catalogue of . . . Printed Broad-sides in . . . Society of Antiquaries* (London, 1866), pp. 7-10. Cited by *Dictionary of National Biography*. The broadsides belong to the year 1552.

⁶ James Cranstoun's *Poems of Alexander Montgomerie* (Scottish Text Society, 1887 [pp. 59-86]) has been superseded by the supplementary volume edited for the society by George Stevenson in 1910. The latter dates the "flyting" ca. 1582 (p. xxv).

works the direct imitation of Dunbar and Kennedy that some scholars profess to find,¹ though it is quite probable that the later "flyters" were aware of the classical example of the exercise in which they were engaging. Doubtless they derived some sort of literary sanction from it, but, of course, where the object is to stifle one's adversary in a cloud of unwholesome epithet, to deal above everything else in *personalities*, a great deal of literal copying from one's predecessors is not likely to be observable. In this sense, did Dunbar and Kennedy, in the first instance, have any literary models in mind when they set to work?

Analogues there are, of course, in abundance, from Ovid's *Ibis* and the *Lokasenna* to the sonnet war of Pulci and Matteo Franco. Our Germanic ancestors had a way of twitting each other, and quite possibly both Dunbar and Kennedy were familiar with similar practices among the Celts.² Brotanek finds the immediate impulse to the correspondence between Dunbar and Kennedy in the invectives of Poggio against his fellow humanists, Filelfo and Valla.³ Poggio had visited England in 1419, and Gavin Douglas, at any rate, had some acquaintance with these very invectives.⁴ It cannot be said that Brotanek's parallels really prove direct literary indebtedness on the part of the Scotsmen to the Florentine's quarrels, though it is quite within the range of possibility that his letters may have been known to either Dunbar or Kennedy or both, and even have supplied them with some abusive epithets—Poggio has plenty in good mouth-filling Latin—of which apparently they stood very little in need.

Models which Dunbar and Kennedy more nearly approach in form are provided by the many poetical controversies in Provençal and French. Schipper attributes the "künstlerische Idee" of the "flyting" to the influence of the *jeu-parti* and the *serventois*.⁵ The

¹ As Brotanek and Brie.

² See *The Poems of William Dunbar* (Scottish Text Society, 1893), Vol. I, Introduction, by Æ. J. G. Mackay, pp. cix ff. Warton (p. 37) mentions some sort of poetical quarrel at the Court of Henry III (1272) between Henry de Avranches and a Cornish poet.

³ *Untersuchungen über das Leben und die Dichtungen Alexander Montgomerie* (Wiener Beiträge [Wien und Leipzig, 1896]), pp. 100 ff.

⁴ "And Poggius stude with mony girne and grone,
On Laurence Valla spittand and cryand fy."

[*"Palis of Honour,"* in *Poems of Gavin Douglas* (ed. Small, 1874), I, 47, ll. 13 f.]

⁵ *William Dunbar, sein Leben und seine Gedichte* (Berlin, 1882), p. 64.

former seems to have been much the more common type in Northern France.¹ The challenger propounds his question; his opponent, keeping to the rhymes set him, chooses the side he will defend; then the argument passes back and forth through four stanzas (*coblas*), ending with an appeal by each party to a disinterested judge. Brotanek,² who accepts and develops Schipper's suggestion, cites three *jeux-partis*, one of which, by the way, is not French, but a Provençal *joc-partil*,³ which contain a trace, but hardly more than a trace, of personal invective. Much more of this is found in the Provençal *tenso* and *sirventes*, which discuss, not a question carefully framed for debate, but things in general and personalities in particular. The *tenso* presents obviously analogous traits. Without necessarily implying personal hostility,⁴ it deals freely in personalities: Albert de Malespine twits Raimbaut de Vaqueiras with having been wretched and hungry in Lombardy;⁵ Sordel hopes that Blacatz may be hanged;⁶ Uc de Saint-Circ and the Count of Rhodes accuse each other of avarice.⁷ Even political discussions are not entirely absent from the *tenso*,⁸ but for these the usual place is the freer form of the *sirventes*. Bertrand de Born's outgivings in this form on politics and the strenuous life are as engagingly personal as those of any modern candidate for office.⁹ The *sirventes* did not presuppose an answer, but it sometimes drew one: the Dauphin of Auvergne defended himself against the taunts of Richard I of England.¹⁰ Richard was himself the inheritor of a splendid troubadour tradition. But it seems highly improbable that either Dunbar or Kennedy could

¹ About two hundred examples survive; Voretzsch, *Altfranzösische Literatur* (Halle, 1913), p. 353. For detailed description of these literary types see Heinrich Knobloch, *Die Streitgedichte im Provenzalischen und Altfranzösischen* (Breslau, 1886); Ludwig Selbach, *Das Streitgedicht in der altprovenzalischen Lyrik* (Marburg, 1886); and A. Jeanroy, "La Tenson provençale," *Annales du Midi*, II (1890), 281 ff., 441 ff.

² *Untersuchungen*, pp. 96 ff.

³ Paul Meyer gives it in a French translation in his review of Levy's *Guilhem Figueira*, *Romania*, X (1881), 261 ff.

⁴ Jeanroy, p. 452.

⁵ Raynouard, *Choix des poésies originales des troubadours* (Paris, 1819), II, 193; cf. the *Flying*, II, 269 ff.

⁶ Knobloch, p. 16; cf. the *Flying*, II, 545 ff.

⁷ Bartsch, *Chrestomathie Provençale* (Elberfeld, 1880), p. 159.

⁸ Knobloch, p. 19.

⁹ Barbara Smythe, *Trobador Poets* (London, 1911), pp. 72 ff.

¹⁰ Ida Farnell, *The Lives of the Troubadours* (London, 1896), pp. 56 ff.

have encountered any real tradition of this sort as late as the close of the fifteenth century. The *tençon* and *serventois* seem to have been little cultivated in Northern France,¹ where Dunbar might have met with them on his travels; the Provençal forms are a matter of the thirteenth century at the latest.

As we have already seen, the human impulse to quarrel, in fun or fact, which has found frequent literary expression in the past, was perhaps aggravated in the case of Dunbar and Kennedy by political and temperamental differences between the two men. For further prompting they may have known the letters of Poggio, which, however, offered little or nothing in the way of literary form; this they might have had from certain Romance forms, with which, however, it is difficult to believe they could have had much acquaintance. Any literary form which would suggest the notion of a poetical contest, involving a certain metrical symmetry, with a more or less explicit appeal for a decision between the contestants, would provide all the literary stimulus and sanction that the "flyters" would need. That they had definitely in mind a well-known work which possessed these characteristics, however great or little its actual influence upon them may have been, I shall now undertake to demonstrate.

We return to Kennedy's dark utterance, to which passing reference has already been made:

Insenswat sow, ceiss, fals Ewstace air!
And knaw, kene skald, I hald of Alathia.²

The lines have hitherto proved a puzzle, the cause of much fruitless speculation among the editors.³ The difficulty lies with the proper names. Why is Dunbar called "false Eustace's heir," and who or what is "Alathia"?

Æneas J. G. Mackay, who writes the Introduction in the Scottish Text Society edition, includes the name "Eustase" among the "Historical Notices of Persons Alluded to in Dunbar's Poems," "but

¹ Gaston Paris, *Littérature française au moyen âge* (Paris, 1905), p. 202; Knobloch, p. 52; Voretzsch, p. 353.

² Schipper, *Denkschriften*, etc., XL, 65, ll. 81-82; *The Poems of William Dunbar* (ed. John Small) (Scottish Text Society, 1893), II, 21, ll. 321-22; *The Poems of William Dunbar* (ed. H. Bellyse Baildon) (Cambridge, 1907), p. 74, ll. 81-2.

³ Schipper, quoted above, is printing from the Bannatyne MS. The variants give no help: "Eustase air" (Chepman and Myllar), "Eustace fair" (Reidpeth); "Alathya" (Maitland).

who false Eustase was has not been discovered."¹ Concerning Alathia, Dr. Walter Gregor, in his notes to the same edition,² exhibits considerable classical learning not greatly to the point:

Alathya, Alethia = probably ἀλήθεια, Truth, in contrast with "fals Eustase air." Probably a figure in some masque was so called. Or is Alathya = Ilithyia, Εἰλείθυια, the goddess of the Greeks who aided women in childbirth, Lat. *Juno Lucina*, and the poet means to say that he knows everything about the genealogy and birth of his opponent, as if he had the information from the goddess who assisted at his birth?

Schipper (*loc. cit.*) quotes Mackay as to Ewstace and for the explanation of Alathia resorts, not to mythology, but to logic:

Murray, A New Engl. Dict., explains *alethiology* as the doctrine of truth, that part of logic which treats of the truth, and he quotes a passage from Sir W. Hamilton's (1837-1838) *Logic*, where the word occurs in this sense. Possibly the word *alethia* was in former times used as a logical term in a similar sense.

H. Bellyse Baildon, so far as I know the latest to comment on the passage, refrains from conjecture: "*Fals Ewstace air* (heir). It is not known to whom this refers . . . *Alathia*, Gk. ἀλήθεια, 'truth.'"³

All this is obviously desperate to the last degree. It is cited merely to show that the true meaning of this passage, if it could be hit upon, would be welcome. When it appears, it is not in the least recondite from the early sixteenth-century point of view.⁴ Kennedy's

¹ I. ccxx.

² III, 54-55.

³ P. 255.

⁴ Dr. Gregor's "Ilithyia" is much too recondite. Sixteenth-century poets much later than Dunbar and Kennedy share with those of the Middle Ages the desire to have their allusions understood. Of Daphne, Chaucer is at pains to tell us

"I mene nat the goddesse Diane,

But Peneus doughter, which that highte Dane" [*Cant. Tales*, A 2063 f.].

The hint puts us straight. No one is going to miss Sackville's allusion to sleep, in the "Induction" to the *Mirror for Magistrates*, as

" . . . esteeming equally

Kyng Cresus pompe, and Irus pouertie" [Skeat, *Specimens*, p. 293], simply because he doesn't remember who Croesus and Irus were, much less that Ovid had already contrasted them (*Tristia* III. 7. 42). Where no hint is given the resemblance may safely be taken as intended to be of the most general sort, as when Skelton compares Mistress Margaret Tynney to Canace and Phaedra (*Garlande of Laurell*, ll. 906 ff.); the common term is merely the "goodness" of the mediaeval "good woman." Too much learning is sometimes a dangerous thing. Douglas, in the *Palice of Honour*, says that among these lovers and their ladies—

"There was Arcyte and Palemon aswa

Accompanyit with fair Aemilia" [p. 22, ll. 25 f.];

whereupon Small solemnly assures us that Aemilia was a vestal virgin who miraculously rekindled the sacred fire!

allusion means little or nothing, unless it is recognized. He is not merely calling names;¹ he is making a point; and for such a purpose he is hardly the man to risk a dark hint at pagan mythology or dubious school-logic. His own reading, we may guess, was largely of a devotional sort, for all he says he has "perambulit of Pernaso the montane" (l. 97). Of the readers of his own time he complains:

But now, allace! men ar mair studyus
To reid the Seige of þe toun of Tīre,
The Life of Tursalem, or Hector, or Troylus,
The vanite of Alexanderis empire.²

This, we may guess, is a fair sample of Kennedy's own reading in his more secular moods; it is not of a sort to encourage the kind of allusion his commentators would have him indulge in.

There is, however, one sort of book to which allusion could safely be made—a widely used schoolbook. A reference to *Cato* would not have gone astray. Such another book is the *Ecloga Theoduli*, a Carolingian Latin poem of the ninth century.³ Furnished with a commentary, it was frequently recommended as a textbook during the later Middle Ages.⁴ Of this famous work Osternacher lists no less than one hundred and twenty-one MSS, twenty-five printed editions before 1515, and as many more of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries bound up with other works, chiefly in the volume known as *Auctores Octo*. Subsequent research has made some additions to this list.⁵ "Qua re dilucide probatur hunc auctorem illa aetate

¹ When he does that, his allusions are not always perfectly obvious; later, among the ancestors of "Deulbeir," he mentions "Vespasius thy eme" (l. 180):

"Herod thy vthir eme, and grit Egeass,
Martiane, Mahomeit, and Maxentius . . .
Throip thy neir neice and awsterne Olibrius,
Pettedew, Baall, and eke Ejobuluss [ll. 185-89].

The name *Fermilus*, in *Passion of Christ* (l. 25), remains unexplained, though it is presumably biblical. See "Poems of Walter Kennedy" (ed. J. Schipper), *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Phil.-Hist. Cl. (Wien, 1902), Bd. 48, p. 26, and F. Holthausen, "Kennedy Studien," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, CXII, 298.

² *Passion of Christ*, ll. 36-39.

³ *Theoduli Eclogam* recensuit . . . Johannes Osternacher, *Ripariae prope Lentiam*, MDCCCII.

⁴ On the vogue of *Theodulus* see two interesting papers by Professor G. L. Hamilton, "Theodulus, a Mediaeval Textbook," *Modern Philology*, VII (1909), 169 ff., and "Theodulus in France," *ibid.*, VIII (1911), 611 ff.

⁵ Hamilton, *Modern Philology*, VII (1909), 180.

discipulis vulgo legendum praebitum esse."¹ Kennedy could hardly have missed it, nor could his contemporary reader.

It is not necessary to describe the *Theodulus* in detail. It is an *amoebae*an pastoral, in which the shepherd Pseustis tells in hexameter quatrains (with single internal, not strictly leonine, rhyme) a story of classical mythology, as of Deucalion's flood, Hippolytus, Hercules, and the like, four lines to each. Each story is immediately capped by the shepherdess Alithia with an analogue, also told in four lines, from the Bible: Noah, Joseph, or Samson. Toward the close Pseustis begins to weaken, and finally the judge, Fronesis, intercedes on behalf of the defeated pagan. A later hand has added Alithia's closing hymn of triumph and praise.²

The reader has now doubtless availed himself of the opportunity to guess that the names of the contestants in the *Theodulus* solve the puzzle of Kennedy's unexplained reference. "Alathia" is Alithia and "Ewstace" was originally "false Pseustis," or as Kennedy is more likely to have written it, "fals Sewstis" (so Kennedy's contemporary, Barclay, spells the name).³ Then "fals Sewstis" has become by wrong division "falss ewstis," or by a natural haplography "fals ewstis"; later this has undergone brilliant restoration to outward sense (at the hand of the transcriber?) in the form "fals Ewstace."⁴ With this hint Kennedy's allusion appears as pat as can be. His adversary, whom he accuses of heresy and irreligion,⁵ is the heir of Pseustis, or falsehood, the pagan opponent of orthodoxy or truth, which, in turn, is represented by Alithia, from whom Kennedy derives his inheritance, or, merely, on whose side he is to be found.⁶ Here then, if

¹ Osternacher, p. 23.

² Dante runs a similar parallel between the Hebraic and the Hellenic up the seven terraces of Purgatory, but his examples, chosen to illustrate particular vices and virtues, differ from those of the *Theodulus*, where the ingenuity goes to the matching of analogous stories, except in the doubtless fortuitous instance of the coupling of Cain and Cecrops in the latter (ll. 53-60) and of Cain and Aglauros, daughter of Cecrops, in Dante (*Purg.*, XIV, 130-39).

³ See below.

⁴ Such distortion of the name is not surprising. Henri d'Andeli's *Bataille des sept arts* has Sextis and Malicia in both MSS; see L. J. Paetow, *Memoirs of the University of California*, IV (1914), 1, Plates V and IX. The printer betrays even Professor Hamilton, at the moment of referring to this point, into seeming to write *Peustis* himself, *Modern Philology*, VII (1909), 182.

⁵ "Lollard lawreat" (l. 172), "lamp Lollardorum" (l. 196), "primas Paganorum" (l. 197), he calls him.

⁶ See *New English Dictionary*, s.v. "hold," 19, 21. Kennedy's insistence on his own orthodoxy rules out the possibility that he might have come upon the names Pseustis

nothing else, is a bit of text cleared up and another literary allusion to a famous book restored to a place between Chaucer's "dan Pseustis"¹ and Barclay's

. . . . father auncient,
Which in briefe language both playne and eloquent,
Betwene Alatheia, Sewstis stoute and bolde
Hath made rehearsall of all thy storyes olde,
By true historyes vs teaching to object
Against vayne fables of olde Gentiles sect.²

I have no wish to force a parallel between the form of the *Theodulus* and the *Flyting*; they are not in result at all the same thing. But it is fair to note that the *Theodulus* offers, with its poetical contest, its "matched" stanzas, and its appeal to the judge, everything in the way of literary suggestion that the "flyters" could have required for a start. Such suggestion might have come, as we have already seen, from a variety of sources; it might have come from the vernacular *débat*, upon which, as Professor Hanford has recently shown,³ the *Theodulus* was an important influence. But over all the possible sources which have been put forward for the work of Dunbar and Kennedy the *Theodulus* itself now has the immense advantage of being certainly known to them. It provides a thread, if a slender one, which leads us back through the Carolingian *conflictus*, to the *amoebaeon* song of Vergil and Theocritus. It is not without significance that the road back to the classics lies through the Middle Ages.

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and Alithia in Wicklif's well-known *Triologus* (ed. Gotthardus Lechler, Oxon., 1869), where the three disputants bear the names of the characters of the *Ecloga*. Wicklif's Alithia approvingly elicits from Phronesis, who is a lecturer rather than a judge, statements concerning the sacraments and the clergy, particularly in Book IV, which Kennedy would certainly repudiate.

¹ *Hous of Fame* (l. 1228). *Atiteris* in the preceding line is certainly not *Alithia*. Holthausen's suggestion (*Anglia*, XVI, 264 ff.) of *Tityrus* is most apt. Perhaps the initial *A* is really due to some confusion with *Alithia*, of whom the scribe or author would be likely to think in this connection.

² *Certayne Egloges of Alexander Barclay, Priest*, reprinted from the edition of 1570 for the Spenser Society (1885), No. 39, p. 1. Eclogue IV mentions the death of Sir Edward Howard, in 1513, so that Barclay's allusion is presumably later than Kennedy's.

³ "Classical Eclogue and Mediaeval Debate," *Romanic Review*, II (1911), 16-31, 129-43.